

# Shorter shifts concern ambulance workers

By **TIM FLACH**  
*Staff Writer*

Some Lexington County ambulance workers are protesting new 12-hour work shifts, contending the schedule creates more fatigue than the old 24-hour shifts. The change means inadequate rest, too much overtime and not enough time for family, recreation and second jobs, they told County Council last week.

The complaints surprised council members, who adopted the change four months ago after county officials said it would help end a paramedic shortage and improve ambulance response.

"We hear you and will take a look at what you say," Councilman Johnny Jeffcoat of Irmo said.

The 12-hour shifts become standard for all county ambulance workers today. They were adopted in some parts of the county earlier this spring.

Shortening shifts should help reduce fatigue and retain staff, county Emergency Medical Service director Tom Gross said.

County officials have no reported incidents of improper care from tired ambulance personnel. But "you can't possibly be as alert" at the end of a 24-hour shift as you can on a shorter one, Gross said.

About 20 of 85 paramedics and

other personnel proposed a mix of 8-, 12- and 24-hour shifts, saying that will keep them from quitting.

The shorter shifts would be used in more populated areas with frequent calls for service; the longer ones used in rural parts of the county where calls come less often. And it wouldn't cost any more pay, supporters said.

Tom Hammond, a spokesman for the ambulance workers, said the shorter shifts are more stressful and don't allow enough time to relax. "You're not going to improve service," he said.

Naps are allowed during lulls in the 24-hour shifts, so workers are refreshed, he said. The longer

shift also is followed by a few days off, which allow emergency personnel time to unwind or take on a part-time job. The 24-hour schedule also reduces the need for day care for children, Hammond said.

Those complaints were considered before EMS leaders asked council members to OK uniform 12-hours shifts, Gross said.

Many suburban areas in South Carolina rely on 12-hour shifts.

It's too soon to say whether the shift change is improving response time to calls, Gross said. County ambulances respond to 90 percent of calls within 19 minutes. Medical experts say the ideal is 12 minutes in suburban areas.

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